New Nouveau Brunswick CANADA

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N.B. Human Rights Commission

Human Rights Commission 1999-2000 annual report (01/03/29)

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FREDERICTON (CNB) -- The 1999-2000 annual report of the New Brunswick Human Rights Commission was released today by Training and Employment Development Minister Norman McFarlane.

"The past year has been a time of transition and renewal at the commission," Commission Chair Patrick Malcolmson said. "It has also marked a year of remarkable change in the area of human rights. The mission of the commission to promote human rights education continues to be as important as ever."

"The commission continues to work as hard as possible to resolve complaints at an informal stage and to mediate formal complaints in the hope of preventing costly and lengthy legal battles," Malcolmson said. "It is important for the public to understand that most of the Commission's work involves a concerted effort to bring complaints to a satisfactory conclusion as quickly as possible."

In the annual report, director Janet Cullinan noted the Commission processed 383 formal and informal complaints in 1999-2000. Formal complaints are investigated by the commission, while informal complaints are cases where complainants opt to bypass the investigation phase and go directly into the conciliation phase.

Statistics in the report show that over three quarters of the formal complaints were employment- related. For the first time since the late 1980s, disability discrimination complaints were the most numerous. They outnumbered sex discrimination and sexual harassment complaints combined.

Associate director Karen Taylor reported on the activities of the Education and Development Branch. Publications under development in 1999-2000 included a toolkit entitled 'Building the Respectful Workplace and Learning Environment', a workshop on hate, and a teacher's activity guide for grades 4 to 8 entitled 'Learning Together'. Taylor said the commission Web site was receiving an average of 426 page requests per day.

While five boards of inquiry were appointed to hold public hearings into complaints in 1999-2000, none of them issued decisions during that period, mainly because the cases were eventually settled. In addition, four cases that were referred to a board of inquiry in the previous year were settled in 1999-2000.

One of the important legal developments in the human rights field in Canada in 1999 was that, in the 'Meiorin' and 'Grismer' cases, the Supreme Court of Canada redefined and standardized the criteria that

discriminatory requirements and policies must meet in order to be justified under human rights legislation. As a result, employers, service providers and property owners must in all cases accommodate individuals when they can do so without incurring undue hardship.

The New Brunswick Human Rights Commission administers the provincial Human Rights Act, which prohibits discrimination and harassment based on religion, age, marital status, sex, sexual orientation, mental and physical disability, race, colour, national origin, place of origin and ancestry. The act applies to all employers, public services and housing, except those that fall under federal jurisdiction.

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EDITORS NOTE -- Copies of the 1999-2000 annual report of the Human Rights Commission are available from Aline Barnett at 506-453-2301. For more information about the Human Rights Commission and the Human Rights Act, see http://www.gnb.ca/hrc-cdp/e/index.htm .

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